

# ICYMI: Governor Greg Abbott: Local Property Tax Burden Is Crushing The Texas Dream

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AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott wrote an op-ed featured in the *Houston Chronicle* today that expressed his commitment to reining in skyrocketing property taxes. This issue is a top priority of the Governor's special session call.

## Local Property Tax Burden Is Crushing The Texas Dream

By Gov. Greg Abbott

*Houston Chronicle*

Everything is bigger in Texas - including, unfortunately, your property tax rate. In fact, Texas has one of the highest effective real estate tax rates in the nation. Only Illinois and New Jersey beat us. Let that sink in. Illinois. And New Jersey. That's unacceptable.

Texas is still the envy of the nation. With our strong economy, overall lower costs of living and high quality of life, Texas remains the best place to raise a family, build a business and create greater opportunity for all.

Your hard-earned dollars still stretch further here; you can buy or rent more square footage with them than in many other states.

And the Texas dream is still within reach for many. For now.

Property taxes are the principal funding source for local governments and help pay for necessary services like fire and police protection as well as our public schools. School property taxes make up just over half of property tax collections; cities, counties and special taxing districts make up the remaining 45 percent.

The city and county property tax burden has grown far faster than median household incomes in Texas, with the highest growth in taxes levied by special purpose districts.

And Texans are being crushed.

No government should be able to tax people out of their homes. We must remember: Homeowners are not renting their land from the city.

But homeowners are not the only ones affected. As the taxes on multifamily and single family rental housing rise, that tax increase is reflected in ever-higher rental payments. Businesses also bear a heavy property tax burden.

Thousands of Texans rightly protest the increase in the appraised value of their home each year in an effort to lower their property tax bill. Even if they are successful in lowering the appraised value, they can still see their tax bill increase - because their local leaders do not cut the tax rate to account for rising values.

In Harris County, for example, the county portion of property tax bills increased 36.4 percent in just the last three years.

We are seeing the same obscene and unsustainable increases in counties around the state. As a result, few other issues unite Texans with such passion. We've heard hours of testimony from homeowners and business owners from across the state who have experienced skyrocketing property taxes:

"I have not gotten a raise in five years, but everyone getting property taxes has."

"I didn't get 29 percent more services."

"It is time for we the people to assert our authority and control the rate of increase in property tax bills."

And while the Legislature passed several property tax relief bills last session that I proudly signed into law to add transparency and improve accountability, we must do more to put a lid on property taxes.

During the special session this summer, I am calling on the Legislature to enact meaningful measures to provide real property tax relief. And I appreciate the leadership of state Sen. Paul Bettencourt and state Rep. Dennis Bonnen, and the strong support of state Rep. Richard Raymond, on this issue.

Today in Texas, if a city, county or special district adopts a tax rate that exceeds an 8 percent tax revenue increase, voters may petition for an election to "rollback" the tax rate. That petition must include signatures of up to 10 percent of registered voters depending on the total dollar amount of the increase, and those signatures must be gathered in 90 days.

That's a herculean challenge in Harris County, the state's largest county, or in any other county, large or small.

As a result, rollback elections are rare.

Voter approval should be a basic requirement for a tax increase. Local officials should ask permission to take your hard-earned money, not your forgiveness.

We must put power back into the hands of the people to hold local governments accountable.

Voters deserve the right to vote on tax rate increases. They should not have to petition their government for that right. And the rollback election trigger must be lower than 8 percent.

By providing meaningful tax relief, the Texas Legislature will help to unleash growth, preserve essential property rights and keep the Texas dream within reach for more Texas families and job-creating business owners.